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**THESIS**

**THE HONEYMOON IS OVER  
HUNGARY'S FIRST TWO YEARS IN NATO**

by

Janos Eszes

June 2001

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Donald Abenheim  
Tjarck G. Roessler

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**THE HONEYMOON IS OVER  
HUNGARY'S FIRST TWO YEARS IN NATO**

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Major, Hungarian Air Force  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN  
NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Hungary has gone through its third democratic election since the systemic changes in 1989. There is clear continuity in the foreign policy goals of the government, including Euro-Atlantic integration efforts (Hungary became a NATO member in March 1999, and is expecting to acquire accession to the European Union in the near future). The priority of building good relations with the country's neighbors remains strong.

Hungary has gone through military reform. By the end of 1997, it had finished the quantitative phase. In the second phase, the goal is to introduce qualitative changes, including defense strategy and technological modernization of the armed forces. Another key element is to perfect full-fledged democratic and civilian control over the armed forces.

Hungary has been working on the issue of good-neighborly relations. The country has successfully mended historic ties with most of its neighbors. This reconciliation is in the interest of the countries involved, of the entire region, as well as that of Europe as a whole.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Hungary's political, economic, and social structures changed profoundly between spring 1989 and spring 1990. After four decades, multiparty democracy and the free market replaced the one-party Communist system and the command economy.

This systemic change represented an embrace of new values, which in turn have determined the main direction of Hungarian foreign policy. Integration into the Euro-Atlantic community through accession to NATO and the European Union has been a priority of both the present and previous governments. Efforts to improve and broaden Hungary's relations with neighboring countries have been an important part of this endeavor, ending historic tensions, achieving reconciliation, and fostering mutual confidence.

July 1997 will be remembered as a significant date in Hungary's Euro-Atlantic integration process. At the Madrid Summit, Hungary, along with the Czech Republic and Poland, were invited to start accession talks with NATO. A few days later, the European Commission released a statement confirming that Hungary was capable of meeting the

obligations of European Union membership and was prepared to start accession talks to this end.

NATO's decision in Madrid and accession in March 1999 has opened the way for Hungary to become a full member of the community of democracies. This decision carried a clear message: the Euro-Atlantic community recognized the efforts made by Hungary to strengthen its political, economic, and social stability and to meet the criteria of accession, and it valued Hungary's contribution to strengthening security in Central and Eastern Europe.

In seeking to join NATO, Hungary was not motivated by the fear of a military threat. Its determination to become a member of the Alliance was based on shared values and the desire to contribute to a favorable security environment. For Hungary, NATO enlargement represents the eastward expansion of the region of security and stability in Europe. Hungary wanted to be part of this region, and to enjoy the benefits of security that NATO membership guarantees. At the same time, Hungary clearly understands the obligations of membership and intends to make its contribution to mutual defense and enhanced security and stability in its region and Europe as a whole.

Security in Europe can only be effectively guaranteed by the creation of a European security architecture that establishes links among various bilateral and multilateral security structures, organizations, and institutions. The Euro-Atlantic organizations are the key pillars of this security architecture. NATO plays a particularly significant role since it possesses the only convincing military capability that can deter threats and, when required, enforce the peace.

Bilateral basic treaties between neighboring states also contribute to the emerging security structure in Europe, and Hungary has concluded a number of such treaties. Those concluded with Slovakia and Romania go beyond bilateral relations since these treaties also contribute to regional stability. They confirm the inviolability of borders and mutually renounce territorial claims, thus removing historical mutual mistrust. They also provide for the respect of the rights of national minorities, in accordance with European standards, providing a new legal instrument for preventing the emergence of new tensions.

While these basic treaties provide a comprehensive framework for developing bilateral relations, settling

disputes and preventing the emergence of new problems, they are only the institutional precondition to improving bilateral relations. The actual creation of good-neighborly relations depends on the efforts and goodwill of the parties to these treaties.

Although Hungary has already taken important steps, there is still intensive work to be done. The country must continue reform and modernization of the military, achieving further progress in interoperability and compatibility. Economic conditions necessary to carry the financial burden of membership must also be created.

Hungarian foreign policy also faces challenges. Hungary must remain committed to assisting its neighbors who wish to join NATO as soon as possible. In Hungary's opinion, the enlargement process must continue, avoiding even temporary lines of division.



## I. INTRODUCTION

The year 1999 brought significant changes for Hungary. The country, together with Poland and the Czech Republic, became a member of NATO on March 12. On that day, Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Janos Martonyi deposited Hungary's NATO accession document with the United States in the Truman Library at Independence, Missouri, along with Poland and the Czech Republic.

Below is a press dispatch from Budapest, Hungary:

On March 12, the NATO flag flying in front of Hungary's contact embassy - the Royal Netherlands - was lowered and given to Premier Viktor Orban. The move symbolized that from that day, Hungary was a NATO member in its own right.

The Grenadier Guards of the United Kingdom also participated, laying a wreath at Heroes' Square of Budapest.

In Norfolk, Virginia, the flags of the three new members were officially raised and similar ceremonies took place in Mons, Belgium and Naples, Italy.<sup>1</sup>

How did a journalist see Hungary join NATO?

So it finally happened, but with none of the pomp and grandeur you might have expected.

A simple flag lowering and raising ceremony at the Royal Netherlands Embassy and an exchange of handshakes and Hungary was a member of NATO.

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<sup>1</sup> Budapest Sun Online, Volume VII, Issue 11 (18 March 1999) at <http://www.budapestsun.com> [15 May 2001]

It might seem a low-key response, and in the literal sense of the phrase it was. But it was more than that. It was the dignified, solemn response of a country which is becoming ever more mature as a democracy.

[...]

This is the same country that somewhat surprised NATO, which had assumed everyone would want to join, no questions asked, when it insisted on holding a referendum and getting public backing first.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Hungary wanted to join NATO and it was among the first former Eastern Bloc countries that expressed their intention to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Janos Martonyi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary stated in his speech in Independence, Missouri:

[...] Let me thank the governments and legislatures in the member states, all those who supported the cause of our membership. They understood that we wanted to join NATO for the same reason for which no member wants to leave it. They know that, by joining the Alliance, we want not to win but to prevent wars. [...] For us, it is a matter of vital importance that other states of the region remain committed to joining NATO. Hungary will support their aspirations in two ways. First, we shall prove that new members can indeed add to the weight of the Alliance. Second, we will continue

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<sup>2</sup> "Of NATO days and National Holidays". Budapest Sun Online, Volume VII, Issue 11 (18 March 1999) at <http://www.budapestsun.com> [15 May 2001]

<sup>3</sup> For Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Gyula Horn's statement see "Upheaval in the East: Hungary; Budapest Broaching a Role in NATO". The New York Times, 24 February 1990. Available (online): LEXIS-NEXIS/NEWS/MAJPAP (HORN AND NATO) [6 February 2000]

to engage prospective members and to have a meaningful partnership with them.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis describes Hungarian foreign policy (with special regard to its neighboring states) and military affairs, as well as the way Hungary implemented these goals during the first two years in NATO.

This process required multi-faceted labor of policy maker, soldier and many others. Here is an illustration: the arrival of the earlier mentioned British Guards was not without problems, special permission was needed for the soldiers to cross neutral Austria and an Act of Parliament was necessary for them to enter Hungary, which still has to alter rules allowing NATO troops access.<sup>5</sup>

The thesis also provides a brief history of Hungarian quest for security after the systemic change of 1989.

Finally, it concludes that Hungary has to put more effort in reforming its military and, due to its stated attention toward Hungarian minorities living in the

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<sup>4</sup> For the full text of the speech see [http://www.mfa.gov.hu/Szovivoi/Korabbi/1999/Martonyi\\_beszed/Deposit-EN.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.hu/Szovivoi/Korabbi/1999/Martonyi_beszed/Deposit-EN.htm) [16 May 2001]

<sup>5</sup> Source: Budapest Sun Online, Volume VII, Issue 11 (18 March 1999) at <http://www.budapestsun.com> [15 May 2001]

neighboring countries, must demonstrate patience and tolerance in handling its arguments with those states.

## **II. FROM INDEPENDENCE TO INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI<sup>6</sup>**

There are numerous analyses of the latest NATO enlargement. The following chapter gives an overview of Hungary's road to NATO from the Hungarian perspective.

### **A. THE BEGINNING**

Hungary's earliest contacts with NATO go back to the end of the 1980s. It was in 1988 that the political parties important in Hungary's recent history emerged and the Government accepted a NATO invitation. In November, Deputy Foreign Minister Gyula Horn addressed the Hamburg meeting of the North Atlantic Council. He welcomed the beginning of a direct dialogue between the Warsaw Pact countries and NATO members; he also welcomed the development that Hungary, the first of the Warsaw Pact countries to do so, had made contact with the Council of Europe.

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<sup>6</sup> On 12 March 1999, after completion of their own national legislative procedures, the Foreign Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland deposited instruments of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty in a ceremony in Independence, Missouri, in the United States. This marked their formal entry into the Alliance.

In February 1990, Gyula Horn, already Foreign Minister, announced at a meeting of the Society of Political Sciences that a close connection with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization would be established, and he could even envisage the possibility that Hungary could one day become a member of one or the other political bodies of NATO.

He said that the simultaneous disbandment of the Warsaw Pact and NATO in the current situation was an illusion. He suggested transforming the Warsaw Pact into a consultative and co-coordinative body, stripping away all its decision-making powers.

One has to seize every opportunity for this confrontation to be built down. One way is to develop close ties, which can lead to cooperation. I don't exclude a case where Hungary and other Warsaw Pact countries could join NATO's political organizations. It would be a mistake to exclude this possibility in a united Europe.<sup>7</sup>

This speech caused a great stir, especially since it was presented on Hungarian television as if the Foreign Minister had spoken about the possibility of Hungary's joining NATO. The Soviet government was dismayed by Hungary's drifting closer to NATO, and made its dismay

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<sup>7</sup> "Upheaval in the East: Hungary; Budapest Broaching a Role in NATO". The New York Times, 24 February 1990. Available (online): LEXIS-NEXIS/NEWS/MAJPAP (HORN AND NATO) [6 February 2000]

clear through diplomatic channels. When Horn delivered the speech, however, Budapest already had Moscow's word on the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Hungary, and the text of the agreement had been prepared for signature. But the Warsaw Pact was still in existence, and Moscow made it clear that it wished to maintain the organization.

The need for NATO guarantees was perceived around that time. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops, there was a general anxiety over the possibility of a power vacuum in the region and a belief that only NATO could prevent this. It was generally felt that, in the case of a Soviet restoration neither the UN nor the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), would be able to offer effective help.

After the first free elections in 1990, Prime Minister Jozsef Antall acted cautiously in foreign policy. Without actually mentioning NATO membership, he considered a gradual disengagement from the Warsaw Pact and the strengthening of ties with the European Community his most important objectives. On Antall's initiative, Parliament passed an important resolution in June 1990. The House instructed the Government to start negotiations over Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, "in view of the

fundamentally changed circumstances compared to the conditions prevailing at the time of signing the Pact."

In the meantime, the Government's intermediate goal ought to be the suspension of Hungary's participation in the military structure of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>8</sup>

Also in June 1990, during a visit to Brussels, Antall had talks with Secretary General Manfred Wörner— the first head of government from a former Soviet block country to do so.<sup>9</sup>

At that time NATO membership still seemed to be an unrealistic goal in the Hungarian Government's opinion. However, for Hungary, NATO was the guarantee of European stability. While the country had great esteem for the international agreements, Helsinki and CSCE, it regarded NATO as the only effective organization to guarantee security. Much thought was given to the possibility of Hungary becoming neutral.<sup>10</sup> Several politicians argued for neutrality, while others pointed out that, with the Cold War over, that status had become meaningless. It also

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<sup>8</sup> For the full text of resolution see the archive of Hungarian laws and parliamentary resolutions at <http://www.complex.hu/kzldat/O90H0054.HTM/O90H0054.HTM> [16 May 2001]

<sup>9</sup> Kun, Joseph C. Hungarian foreign policy: the experience of a new democracy. Praeger, Westport, Conn., 1993. p 80.

<sup>10</sup> Hungarian Foreign Policy, p 51.



seemed unlikely that the great powers and the neighboring countries would recognize Hungary's neutrality by an international treaty, as had been the case with Austria in 1955.

The idea of joining NATO revived in 1991. The last Soviet soldier had left Hungarian territory in June; the Warsaw Pact was abolished on July 1; and the Soviet Union itself fell apart at the end of the year.

The North Atlantic Council made an important gesture in August 1991, when, on the third day of the attempted coup in Moscow, it discussed the situation. The Foreign Ministers attending the meeting issued a declaration, in which, in reference to the anxiety in Central and Eastern European countries, they stated:

Last June in Copenhagen, we stated that the consolidation and preservation throughout the continent of democratic societies and their freedom from any form of coercion or intimidation are of direct and material concern to us. Noting the enhanced concern of Central and Eastern European states, we reiterate our conviction that our own security is inseparably linked to that of all other states in Europe, particularly to that of the emerging democracies. We expect the Soviet Union to respect the integrity and security of all states in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Statement issued by the North Atlantic Council Meeting in Ministerial Session at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, 21 Aug. 1991. The full text is available on NATO website at <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c910821a.htm> [16 May 2001]

This was a plain warning to Moscow, which it could not afford to ignore, regardless of the outcome of the coup.

The primary goal of Hungary was undoubtedly the declaration and institutionalization of the country's Western orientation.<sup>12</sup> Hungary wanted to return to the place where it always thought it rightfully belonged. Although it developed Western-type democratic institutions after the political transition, and opened its borders, the political elite and the general public thought that Hungary's full return to the West was not possible without membership of the two most important Western organizations, the European Union and NATO. Since it had soon become obvious that joining the Western-European integration was going to take quite a long time, people's attention was concentrated on the North Atlantic Alliance.

The historical consciousness of the political class also played a part in the efforts to achieve integration with the West. The fundamental fact here is that the Hungarian nation had no such thing as an independent state from the 16th century right up to 1918, and the period of independence between the two World Wars was cut short by, first, the expansion of the Third Reich and then that of

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<sup>12</sup> For the defined priorities of Hungarian foreign policy see Hungarian Foreign Policy, p 69.

the Soviet Empire.<sup>13</sup> Different generations of the political class had historical experiences of the attempts to revise the Trianon Peace Treaty, the experiences of the Second World War, the persecution of Jews, the terror of the Rakosi era, the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968, followed by the introduction of martial law in Poland. All contributed to a syndrome of which the absence of a predictable future formed a part.

At the same time, Central Europe also realized that after the Second World War, the developed countries of the West achieved long-term stability. Nobody worried about the possibility of military conflict between the countries of the Euro-Atlantic region anymore.

In the other half of the continent, in the various successor states of the former Soviet Union, people found themselves living under conditions of permanent instability. For them the year 1991 brought the beginning of another turbulent period, rather than the promise of stability. In the light of this, it was understandable that the Hungarian political class did not want to be trapped in a "gray zone", in the periphery of the stable region.

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<sup>13</sup> For more information about history of Hungary see Peter F. Sugar, ed., *A History of Hungary*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1990.

The new developments in Russian foreign policy also helped shape public opinion. These years witnessed the realignments in domestic politics in Moscow; both the nationalists and the so-called centrists became critical of Yeltsin's leadership for its alleged Western sympathies.

A number of Russian declarations seemed to serve no other purpose than calling the world's attention to the point that the Russian federation continued to be a great power, whose specific interests were not to be ignored in foreign relations. Moscow believed that if it stopped emphasizing Russian interests at every available opportunity, the world would soon ignore Russia and relegate it to the rank of medium powers.

All this was accompanied by economic and political instability in Russia. The impression in Budapest was that the declining performance of the Russian economy could lead to a serious imbalance, and that the future in Russian domestic politics was also unpredictable.<sup>14</sup>

It was clear that by joining NATO, the Hungarian Government could participate directly in the Alliance's political and military decision-making bodies as well as in

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<sup>14</sup> For a thorough analysis of the situation in Russia during the given period see David S. Yost, *NATO transformed: the Alliance's new roles in international security*. United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington DC, 1998. pp 81-88.

the work of its administrative apparatus, allowing the development of closer and more regular contacts with the leading political circles of the Euro-Atlantic region. Budapest realized that the Alliance had developed a complex mechanism of consultation, which was being used to great advantage in exchanging foreign political information regarding both member and non-member states. Indeed, in some respects member states shaped the foreign policy of the West within the framework of the Alliance. In consequence, Hungary could not be indifferent whether this foreign policy was being defined with or without Hungarian participation.

Naturally, security considerations also helped to shape the views of the political class, namely that NATO membership would guarantee the country's defense. Once a NATO member, Hungary could feel virtually resistant to foreign aggression, since it would be backed by military might that could deter any state from the use of armed force. This factor obviously came into play in connection with the war in neighboring Yugoslavia.

NATO membership, in an indirect way, may increase internal security. Political integration within NATO, along with the intensive communication between political elites

and governments, could favorably influence democratic developments in new member states.

Several Hungarian politicians declared that the economic consequences of the country's NATO membership could also be beneficial. The import of foreign capital would increase, as investors usually regard stability and security as crucial factors. Furthermore, joining NATO also seemed a rational and cost-effective way to modernize Hungary's military defense. For more than a decade, the Hungarian armed forces have added no new weaponry to their arsenal, except for the fighter planes received from Russia as part payment of its debts to Hungary. Modernization was unavoidable, if Hungary wanted its army to remain a credible and capable force. NATO member states, however, do not have to develop the full range of protection, it was argued, as this is precisely one of the great advantages of military integration. NATO membership could offer a level of security, which would not require military expenditure beyond Hungary's present economic capabilities.

#### **B. PARTNERSHIP FOR PEACE**

Due to the diplomatic efforts by the Central European countries, as well as to the revised position of the Clinton administration, by late 1993 the leading NATO

countries had come to accept the idea of expansion. The communiqué approved at the January 1994 session of the North Atlantic Council included the following:

We reaffirm that the Alliance [...] remains open to membership of other European states. [...] We would welcome NATO expansion that would reach to democratic states to our East, as part of an evolutionary process, taking into account political and security developments in the whole of Europe.<sup>15</sup>

Budapest seized the offered opportunity. In February 1994 Foreign Minister Geza Jeszenszky signed the Framework Document containing the most important elements of the program known as Partnership for Peace (PfP), which was subsequently ratified by the Hungarian Parliament.

The next stage came when the Hungarian envoy handed over the Presentation Document containing the Hungarian position. The Individual Partnership Program, endorsed in November 1994 and subsequently revised several times, was based on this document. Simultaneously with the launch of the PfP, prospective member states were offered the opportunity to establish diplomatic relations with NATO. Up until January 1995, Hungary's ambassador to Brussels represented the country in NATO. After this the department assigned to NATO affairs was separated from the Hungarian

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<sup>15</sup> Sean Kay, *NATO and the Future of European Security*. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 1998. p 92.

Embassy, functioning as an Atlantic Liaison Office. In addition, another Hungarian military liaison group was formed to co-operate with SHAPE.

Participation in the PfP presented a serious challenge to the Hungarian army and its military command. The Hungarian Army, trained within the scope of the Warsaw Pact, had to learn an entirely new way of thinking within a relatively short period of time dealing with the concrete tasks associated with Hungary's admission. In the course of an intensifying co-operation, NATO representatives let their Hungarian partners know what they expected. In this area, NATO officials laid emphasis on the broadening of civil control over the military, such as adequate regulation of the institutional and legal framework, and better public relations and greater transparency; they would have liked to see more civilian politicians in the bodies controlling the Hungarian armed forces. Certain changes have been implemented in this regard.

NATO representatives found that the general level of foreign language skills in the Hungarian army was not very high.<sup>16</sup> They encouraged the Ministry of Defense to make

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<sup>16</sup> According to a survey from Spring 1999, less than 1,700 out of 18,000 officers and NCOs of the HDF had appropriate knowledge of English language. Source: HVG 1999/8 (27 February 1999), pp 109-112. Available (online): <http://folioweb.hvg.hu> [16 May 2001]



serious efforts in language instruction. In 1995 the PfP Military Language Training Center was established, where thousands of officers and NCOs received language training, mostly in English. Hundreds of officers were sent to various Western language schools.

An obvious way to prepare the Hungarian army for military integration was through joint exercises in Hungary. Soldiers taking part in these events learned the methods, work documents and procedures of NATO armies; they also gained valuable experiences in peacekeeping, humanitarian and rescue operations. The first Partnership for Peace program in Hungary was a multinational command and staff management exercise at brigade level called Cooperative Light, which was held in 1995, followed by invitations to four other exercises abroad that same year.<sup>17</sup> Most of the exercises in the period up to the formal integration were held under the aegis of the Partnership for Peace. Among the more important exercises was Cooperative Lantern, a command and staff management exercise held in 1998 in Hungary, which was attended by 570

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<sup>17</sup> Source: "Hungary and NATO: on the road to membership", Hungary's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website at <http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NATO/Fact-eng.html> [21 April 2001]

officers from 19 countries.<sup>18</sup> Another important objective concerned procedural harmonization, in other words the gradual introduction of the security policies and NATO'S doctrinal, strategic, operational, tactical and planning procedures and principles.

The largest project within the framework of PfP was arranged in the city of Veszprem. An Air Sovereignty Operation Center (ASOC), mostly installed by the United States, was set up. Brought into service shortly before Hungary's formal admission to NATO, the center plays a major role in the protection of Hungarian airspace.<sup>19</sup>

The ASOC's job is to identify all aircraft entering Hungarian airspace, to track them and, if needed, direct any military operation against them. For the time being, the system transforms the analogue signals of older, Russian-made radar equipment into digital signals, as this is the only way to link the system with the corresponding units of the Alliance. However, by the year 2002 three digital radar stations with three-dimensional imaging capability will be placed in Hungary as part of NATO's

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<sup>18</sup> Source: "Hungary and NATO: on the road to membership". Hungary's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website at <http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NATO/Fact-eng.html> [21 April 2001]

<sup>19</sup> Source: Top Gun Online, 8 February 1999. Available (online): <http://www.topgun.hu/nato/lhk.htm> [16 May 2001]

defense development program; this will further improve the efficiency of the system.<sup>20</sup>

Naturally, this system will also contribute significantly to the safety of civil aviation in the region.

### **C. PARTICIPATION IN IFOR AND SFOR**

After Summer 1995, when NATO launched several air offensives against Bosnian Serb positions on the Security Council's mandate, thus opening the way for the restoration of peace in Bosnia, a decision to include Hungarian troops in the peacekeeping operation swiftly followed.

The Americans needed a logistic base in Hungary near the Yugoslav border. In early November, they inspected the available facilities and the base at Taszar was agreed on. Again in that month, the Ministry of Defense informed NATO that Hungary was ready to participate in the IFOR mission. Ten days after the conclusion of the Dayton peace accord, the first Americans arrived at Taszar. In December an agreement on the transit of NATO troops was signed. Under

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<sup>20</sup> Source: HVG 1999/8 (27 February 1999), p 110. Available (online): <http://folioweb.hvg.hu> [16 May 2001]

the Hungarian Constitution, the agreement required Parliament's approval, which was given that same month.

The Hungarian army sent an engineering unit to Okucani, Croatia, where they were placed under IFOR command. The primary task of the unit was to rebuild and repair destroyed or damaged bridges; in addition, they had to clear roads from mines in order to make them safe for the movement of IFOR/SFOR units. In addition, the Hungarian army contributed to Bosnian operations by making available, partly or wholly, its military bases in cities of Kaposvar and Pecs, by permitting the use of its own radio frequencies, and by coordinating road and railway transport.<sup>21</sup>

Relations between the Hungarian army personnel and the other military units of the IFOR/SFOR mission have been excellent. In recent years many American politicians and military commanders have visited Taszar. They have all been impressed by what they saw there. The most important lesson for NATO about Taszar was that they could depend on co-operation with both the Hungarian Government and army. In

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<sup>21</sup> For details see "The Presence of IFOR/SFOR in Hungary and the Hungarian Military Participation in Peace Operations in the Former Yugoslavia" on Hungary's Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website at [http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NATO/hm\\_ifor.html](http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NATO/hm_ifor.html) [29 May 2001]

fact, the Alliance carried out the greatest troop movement of ground forces in its entire history through Hungary.

After December 1995 Hungary's geo-strategic position undoubtedly strengthened. It became clear that the country had and would continue to have an outstanding role in the solution of armed conflicts along the eastern borders of NATO. This latter factor was not irrelevant from the viewpoint of Hungary's admission to NATO.

In that period, a crucial part of the debate over NATO's expansion concerned the actual choice of the countries. At one time certain member states would have liked to see no more than one or two new states. To a considerable degree, it was due precisely to Tazsar and Hungary's contribution to the peacekeeping operation in Bosnia that soon afterwards there were talks again of the admission of three new members.

#### **D. ADMISSION**

The fact that the leading members of NATO asked the Hungarian Government through various diplomatic channels to settle its ongoing disputes with the neighboring countries, especially the disputes concerning the Hungarian minorities there, could be interpreted as a political condition of

admission. The Study on NATO Enlargement stated unequivocally:

States, which have ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes, including irredentist claims, [...] must settle those disputes in accordance with OSCE principles. Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance.<sup>22</sup>

This was partly the reason why the Horn Government made great efforts to prepare the bilateral treaties with Slovakia and Romania. The Government set two goals there. On the one hand it wished to reassure the two countries concerned that it had no intention to revise the existing borders; on the other hand, it tried to improve the position of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia and Romania.

The government did not wish to open a debate on the first point. It simply reiterated the position already declared in the bilateral treaty signed by the Antall government with Ukraine, whereby Hungary did not have territorial claims against its neighbors, and that it would have no such claims in the future.<sup>23</sup> The situation was much more complex regarding the minority issue, as neither the Meciar government in Slovakia nor Iliescu's administration

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<sup>22</sup> Study on NATO Enlargement, Brussels, 3 September 1995. Available on NATO website at <http://www.nato.int/docu/basic/txt/enl-9501.htm> [16 May 2001]

<sup>23</sup> For the texts of the Basic Treaties see <http://www.htmh.hu/bimulti.htm> [13 May 2001]

in Romania was prepared to give broad rights to the Hungarian ethnic minorities.

Hungary concluded bilateral treaty with Slovakia in 1995. The treaty addressed the problems of both the international borders and the national minorities. It contained both the declaration regarding the borders, and it guaranteed the rights of national minorities across a relatively broad range. Hungary scored a spectacular diplomatic success when it succeeded in having Recommendation 1201 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe accepted as a legally binding document in the bilateral relations of the two countries. Of all the multilateral documents produced so far, this recommendation offers the broadest rights to minorities.<sup>24</sup>

The Romanian government took the treaty between Hungary and Slovakia very badly, and had no intention of following suit. For quite a while the negotiations offered no hope. Nevertheless, the leading Western countries were able to persuade Romania to change its policy. As a result, the bilateral treaty between Hungary and Romania was signed in 1996. This agreement also addressed the problem of the borders and the minority issue, and although Recommendation

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<sup>24</sup> For the text of recommendation see <http://www.meh.hu/nekh/Angol/7/coe/rec1201.htm> [17 May 2001]

1201 was relegated to a footnote, the stipulations laid down there are as legally binding in the two countries' bilateral relations as those contained in the main body of the text.

The opposition parties strongly criticized the decision to sign these treaties, and their MPs all voted to reject ratification. In their view the treaties had serious shortcomings, the most severe being the failure to recognize collective minority rights and the right to autonomy. They argued that it was pointless to sign treaties with the Meciar and the Iliescu government anyway, as these would not implement them in legislation.

At the same time, very little criticism was directed against the paragraphs dealing with the border issue. This demonstrated that by the second half of the 1990s Hungary had got over the Trianon syndrome, which had, in one way or another, always been present in Hungarian political life.

After the ratification of the agreements no serious political force challenged the political consensus that existing borders were indisputable.

In the area of minority rights, there seemed to be no improvement under the Meciar and Iliescu governments, and in some respects the situation even became worse. However, subsequent elections in both Slovakia and Romania returned



coalition governments in which Hungarian minority political parties were junior partners, and the situation significantly improved within two or three years.

In autumn 1995, Hungary's NATO aspirations came under a political threat on the domestic front. The extreme left Workers' Party, which was not represented in Parliament, succeeded in getting the necessary number of signatures to initiate a referendum on the issue of NATO membership, which was still not an issue in domestic politics since no formal invitation to join had been announced, and so the public paid no attention to the problem.

Neither the coalition nor the opposition parties supported the initiative. They thought it was a mistake to consult the public before NATO actually issued the invitation, along with the terms and conditions of admission. The parliamentary parties also took into account the fact that according to the law two years would have to pass before the referendum could be repeated. On these considerations the Parliament voted against holding a referendum at that time, although it also declared that it supported the idea at an appropriate time.

Learning the lessons from this case, the Government started a program in December 1996 in order to increase knowledge among the populations through the presentation of

the purpose of the Alliance, of its activities and of the Hungarian interests in integration. According to opinion polls of that time, almost two-thirds of those having an opinion on the issue were in favor of Hungarian membership in NATO. At the same time, evaluations showed that people who were indifferent or doubtful about membership or rejecting the idea had no categorical or ideologically motivated reason but knew little about NATO.

Hungary held a referendum on November 16, 1997 on the country's NATO membership. The voters were asked to answer to the following question: "Do you agree that the Republic of Hungary should provide for the protection of the country by joining NATO?"

With 49.24 per cent turnout of the eligible voters, the percentage of the YES answer was 85.33 per cent.<sup>25</sup> Thus the voters expressed their support toward NATO membership.

Prior to this referendum, on July 8, 1997 at the Madrid Summit NATO invited the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to begin negotiations with a view to becoming NATO members.

And finally, on March 12, 1999 the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland formally became members of NATO.

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<sup>25</sup> Source: <http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NATO/OVB-eng.html> [21 April 2001]

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary Dr. Janos Martonyi said in his speech at the Deposition of the Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the Accession of Hungary in Independence, Missouri on March 12, 1999:

In the past, Hungarians often complained of abandonment, of standing up alone. At long last, that is over. Hungary has come home; we are back in the family. Together with all of you, we have just started a new chapter of history. From this day on, we are the closest allies in our great endeavor, the quest for peace and prosperity.<sup>26</sup>

For Hungary, joining NATO, the largest network of security that history has ever known, was an institutional breakthrough, and the symbol of its return to Europe.

Hungary celebrated its second year in NATO in March 2001. The two years has not been one without challenges.

NATO's air campaign against the Milosevic regime was a hard test for the Alliance and for all of its members.

For Hungary, the Government and the public opinion alike, it was quite a serious challenge. The alliance that Hungary had just joined had to start military operations against Yugoslavia, and Hungary was providing host nation support to operations targeting areas with a several

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<sup>26</sup> The full text of the speech is available at [http://www.mfa.gov.hu/Szovivoi/Korabbi/1999/Martonyi\\_beszed/Deposit-EN.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.hu/Szovivoi/Korabbi/1999/Martonyi_beszed/Deposit-EN.htm) [21 April 2001]

hundred thousand strong Hungarian national community living in them.

The Hungarian public understood very well what was at stake: to stop ethnic cleansing, to prevent genocide, and to restore faith in the power of common values.

Those difficult months also confirmed that Hungary got rights and opportunities that were equal those enjoyed by the other members. For Hungary, membership in NATO has generated an improvement of co-ordination in the administration and legislation. The high requirements of membership have also had a positive effect on the process of transformation of the country's armed forces into an up-to-date institution with adequate fighting capabilities. Hungarian troops in Kosovo prove it day by day that Hungary is contributing to security.

Hungary feels a very special responsibility towards the issue of NATO's further enlargement. The country's performance in the Alliance will have, and already has, a direct impact on NATO's willingness to start further rounds of enlargement.

Close co-operation between NATO and the EU in order to make them more effective in preventing and managing crises is of high importance. Hungary has a deep commitment to trans-Atlantic, and, similarly, to European co-operation in

the field of security, and these two commitments are not in conflict. By joining efforts, both NATO and the European Union will be stronger, and security in Europe will improve.

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### **III. HUNGARIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

#### **A. THE AIM AND ROLE OF HUNGARIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

Hungary, due to its geographical location, size, and other factors, is far less able to shape its international environment to the degree that the external conditions and changes in these conditions influence its security, economic and political stability. Thus, Hungarian foreign policy has to make the most of the opportunities given by international conditions, with attention to the objective restrictions. At the same time, how Hungary establishes contacts with the states that it considers important, how it is able to join the different national groupings, international organizations and institutions depends on priorities.

One of the aims of Hungarian foreign policy is to guarantee the security of the country. Foreign policy plays a defining role in guaranteeing this security. This role derives not only from the fact that the size and strength of the country's armed forces are not in themselves sufficient for this task, but also from the fact that the main threat in the Central-East European region as a security policy environment comes not from a military

strike, but from risks linked to a lack of stability. Foreign policy has to ensure that Hungary does not have enemies but only has allies on whom Hungary can rely in all circumstances.

Ensuring the essential external resources and markets for the country's economy is a task of no less importance for foreign policy. Hungary has relatively limited natural resources, small domestic market, outdated economic structure, and infrastructure. These facts make active participation in international economic and financial circles unavoidable. One of the basic conditions for 'entry' into this system of contacts is an appropriate political climate between Hungary and those countries Hungary looks to as future economic partners.

Balanced, settled interstate relations and a favorable international assessment of the country can serve to stimulate investment in Hungary too.

## **B. POLICY PRIORITIES**

Hungary makes efforts to ensure its close ties with the developed countries, integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations, the creation of good neighborly relations with the states in the region, and it supports Hungarians living beyond the borders in their quest for recognition of



their rights according to international documents and norms.

Considering the close interconnection and interaction between these three main goals<sup>27</sup>, Hungary treats them in parallel and as being of equal importance.

### **1. European Integration**

After centuries of isolation, the systemic changes provided new prospects for East-Central Europe for joining the developed, democratic Western part of the continent. After joining NATO in March 1999, Hungary attaches special significance to its membership in the European Union. Accession to the Union means accepting common values on the one hand and the guarantee of the country's security in economic and social terms, on the other.

Diplomatic relations between Hungary and the European Communities were established in August 1988 followed by the Europe Agreement signed in Brussels on December 16 1991, establishing an associated status for Hungary to EC.<sup>28</sup> Hungary was one of the first target-countries of the

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<sup>27</sup> The issue of Hungary's relations with NATO was discussed in Chapter II.

<sup>28</sup> For the text of the agreement see the European Union website at [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/lif/dat/1993/en\\_293A1231\\_13.html](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/lif/dat/1993/en_293A1231_13.html) [13 May 2001]

Communities' PHARE<sup>29</sup> program started in 1990 that has since provided financial assistance for economic development and restructuring, environmental investments, R&D, public administration, human resources development, and other tasks serving the aim of preparation for membership.

The Europe Agreement laid the foundation for close co-operation between the two sides. The agreed schedule has resulted in an increasing volume of bilateral trade and EU investments. Hungary's economy has become increasingly bound to the economies of the member states.

Because of consistent economic strategies followed in the recent years, Hungary has been stabilized its economy and has been created conditions for a sustainable economic growth.

Hungary has welcomed the important decisions of the Helsinki European Council of December 1999 on the further

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<sup>29</sup> PHARE is the acronym for "Poland and Hungary: Action for the Restructuring of the Economy". The Phare Program is the EU's financial instrument designed to assist its partner countries in their transition from an economically and politically centralized system to a decentralized market economy and democratic society and to support the reintegration of their economies and societies with Western Europe and the rest of the world. Phare provides grant finance to support its partner countries through the processes of economic transformation and strengthening of democracy to the stage where they are ready to assume the obligations of membership of the European Union.

Source: The European Union website at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/pas/phare/wip/phareprogr.htm> [13 May 2001]

development of common foreign and security policy and the formation of a new Common European Security and Defense Policy (CESDP).<sup>30</sup> It would cover military operations serving crisis management, peace making, and the establishment of required institutional structures. Hungary, as a candidate country to EU, member of NATO, and associated member of Western European Union, is interested in the preservation of the security of the EU and is ready to take an active and proportionate part in the implementation of the European security and defense policy.

As European integration develops, issues related to the sense of security in civil society gain increasing importance. After opening the EU's internal borders and lifting restrictions on the movements of citizens of EU and associated countries, state frontiers will not be a real barrier to the kind of activities that pose a threat to the internal security of society. In this regard, the Hungarian government concluded:

The Government is aware that concurrently with accession Hungary must adopt the EU's visa, refugee, and immigration policy. Therefore, the Government will strive to elaborate and obtain approval for special solutions, which secure smooth communication with citizens of neighboring countries, particularly regarding resident ethnic

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<sup>30</sup> Source: The European Union website at <http://europa.eu.int/council/off/conclu/dec99/index.htm> [23 April 2001]

Hungarian minorities. These solutions should also guarantee that EU membership should not mean regression in Hungary's relations with neighbors.<sup>31</sup>

Hungary will continue its efforts to combat international crime, corruption, and illegal migration. Upon accession, Hungary will guarantee to apply the provisions that relate to control of the external frontiers of the Union.

The Berlin and Helsinki meetings of the European Council in 1999 adopted major decisions to prepare the Union for the next round of admitting new members.<sup>32</sup> Berlin approved the financial provisions facilitating enlargement, while Helsinki undertook the political commitment to reform EU institutions and decision-making process to suit the requirements of an enlarged Union. The Nice European Council successfully outlined the framework for the new institutional system, thus removing a major obstacle on the road leading to the accession of the most prepared candidates.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Government Program for a Civic Hungary- The new millennium is impending." Available (online): <http://www.meh.hu/default.htm> [13 May 2001]

<sup>32</sup> Source: The European Union website at [http://europa.eu.int/council/off/conclu/mar99\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/council/off/conclu/mar99_en.htm) [23 April 2001]

<sup>33</sup> For the details of the Nice European Council see <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/treaties/index.html> [23 April 2001]

Until accession, Hungary makes every effort to exploit the opportunities given in the associate-status agreement.

The government is preparing the country for the EU accession. This task equally comprises increasing economic efficiency and competitiveness, harmonizing the legal system, fulfilling the requirements of European political culture, and informing the public in order to make clear the advantages and the responsibilities that go with the membership.

## **2. Relations with the Neighboring Countries**

Good relations, and close cooperation with neighboring countries and other states in the region are equally important from the point of view of Hungary's security, regional stability, the development of the country's economy and expansion of market potential.

Among Hungary's neighbors, Austria is a country with a developed market economy and is a member of the European Union. Hungary has common borders with three successor states of the former Yugoslavia of which two were engaged for years in armed conflict. Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia, and Romania want to move towards the European and Atlantic institutions. However, the European and Atlantic partners have differently assessed their preparedness: Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia were left out from the first wave of

NATO enlargement. Croatia was not mentioned and Yugoslavia is still condemned in many respects by the countries of the Western community.<sup>34</sup>

NATO has entered into a separate agreement with Ukraine, but neither NATO, nor the European Union expects Ukraine to become a member of these organizations. Four neighbor countries have not had a statehood of their own during the course of history up to 1990. These four neighbors are being faced with the complicated tasks of nation-building.

Such a multiplicity of differences among its neighbors does not make it possible for Hungary to develop relations of the same nature with them. Hungary has conducted successful talks with the majority of its neighbors on the settlement of bilateral relations.

During the past few years, Hungary has signed Basic Treaties with Ukraine, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, and Slovakia.<sup>35</sup>

The Basic Treaties cover the mutual renunciation of territorial claims, the recognition of existing borders and

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<sup>34</sup> A summit of second round NATO aspirant countries took place in Bratislava in May 2001. For coverage, see "NATO hopefuls attempt to revive membership bids." The Washington Times, <http://www.washtimes.com/world/20010511-14696594.htm> [15 May 2001]

<sup>35</sup> For the texts of the Basic Treaties see <http://www.htmh.hu/bimulti.htm> [13 May 2001]

improvement of cross-border movement, and the recognition, guarantee, and practical implementation of commitments to honor the rights of the national minorities living in each other's country.

As no problems have emerged in Hungarian-Austrian relations, a similar treaty was not drawn up and neither party considers it necessary. As far as Yugoslavia is concerned, such an agreement would be necessary, but so far, the events of war and its consequences have delayed it.

The Basic Treaties directly touch two elements of the system of Hungarian priorities in foreign policy, namely its relationship with her neighbors and the handling of the issue of national minorities. The two are obviously interrelated, as the overwhelming majority of the Hungarians who live outside Hungary, are in the neighboring countries.

The already mentioned government program addresses the issue of the Hungarian minorities abroad:

The Government's policy on Hungarian minorities abroad aims to build and develop political, cultural, and economic ties between Hungary and Hungarian communities abroad within the general process of European unification, and to help those Hungarians living in neighboring countries to live prosperously and fruitfully in their own homelands.

For this reason the neighboring countries' Hungarian population and its ties to Hungary must be secured within the framework of law and administration, so that the organic ties to the mother country should remain undisturbed even after Hungary's accession to the European Union.<sup>36</sup>

The government considers the support of Hungarians living beyond the borders as a political-moral obligation. It supports the realization of their efforts to achieve autonomy in compliance with European practice.

Hungary is aware that guaranteeing the rights of the Hungarians beyond the borders, as well as the implementation of these rights in practice, demands a dialogue and normal relations with the political leadership of the concerned neighboring states as well as broad international support.

### **C. THE QUESTION OF HUNGARIAN MINORITIES**

Undertaking responsibility for the national minorities causes concern among observers of Hungarian statecraft outside of Budapest and beyond. Many of them ask how a government can take responsibility for the citizens of

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<sup>36</sup> "Government Program for a Civic Hungary- The new millennium is impending." Available (online): <http://www.meh.hu/default.htm> [13 May 2001]



other countries, and whether this wording violates the norms that have developed in the community of democratic states. Does not it mean an attempt to interfere into the internal affairs of other countries and can it be considered as Euro-conform? What is its motivation?

Hungary's special attention to the minority issues along its borders has lasting historical and recent reasons.

- Nationality and citizenship are two distinct categories. In the history of Central Europe, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious empires existed for centuries, and several nations of the region did not develop their own statehood for a very long time. The lack of understanding of this reality has led to the concept of the homogenous nation state, to a distinction between state-creating and non-state-creating nations, and it was one of the causes of the dissolution of the Austro- Hungarian Monarchy.<sup>37</sup>
- The Hungarians lived for a millennium - excepting the 150 years of Turkish rule - within the framework of the Hungarian Kingdom, up to the peace treaties ending

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<sup>37</sup> For more details about this issue see Oszkar Jaszi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*. University of Chicago Press, 1966.

World War I. Thus, the development of the Hungarian nation much preceded the evolution of the present states and state borders. The post-World War I peace treaties did not partition Hungary along the historically established administrative territorial units, as was done later on in the case of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and the Czech Republic. As a result, Hungary lost two thirds of its territory and half of its population. One third of the population of the Hungarian nation was left in the neighboring countries.<sup>38</sup>

- The Hungarian population retains vivid memories of the various periods of persecution of the Hungarian minority, including acts of mass expulsions after both world wars, different forms of discrimination and violent policies of assimilation.
- The idea of responsibility taken by Hungarian state policy has been strengthened by a broad acceptance of European norms, mainly the acceptance of the idea of respect for human and minority rights.

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<sup>38</sup> For details of the effect of the Trianon Peace Treaties on Hungary see Bela K. Kiraly, ed., *Trianon and East Central Europe*. Columbia University Press, New York 1995.

#### **D. A NEW DEBATE EMERGING: THE PROPOSED STATUS LAW**

The Hungarian government presented plans on April 19, 2001 to grant special rights to ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries, hoping to encourage them to stay in their home countries.

Hungary fears that its prospective entry into the EU could make the country even more attractive to the three million ethnic Hungarians who live beyond its borders.

The plan aims to help Hungarians beyond the border to preserve their language, culture, and national identity, and feel at home in their respective homelands.

"Half of those currently thinking of immigration into Hungary would change their minds if their rights here were legally made equal to those of the average tourist, and at the same time were helped in preserving their Hungarian identity," said Foreign Minister Martonyi in the Parliament.

The plan would involve some 1.6 million Hungarians in Romania, 600,000 in Slovakia, 350,000 in Yugoslavia, 200,000 in Ukraine, 22,000 in Croatia, 10,000 in Slovenia, and 17,000 in Austria. These communities have lived in neighboring states since the 1920 Treaty of Trianon carved up Hungary after World War I. They are currently able to travel freely into Hungary, but this will change when the

country joins the EU and starts imposing visas on non-EU citizens. This situation brings up worries about an influx of migrants before Hungary's EU entry.

The government proposes granting them the right to work for three months legally in Hungary, as well as giving them social and health care rights, free university education, training courses, and travel allowances.

All parties are broadly in support of the proposal, but the opposition Socialists, the country's largest party, has declared the plan should have been discussed with the EU and Hungary's neighbors.<sup>39</sup>

The government said that the plan fully complies with international legal standards and with Hungary's bilateral accords with its neighbors.

### **1. Reactions from Abroad**

On 20 April, 2001 the Romanian Foreign Ministry spokesperson has announced that a committee would be set up to analyze the (Hungarian) status law. The committee will also study the steps that Romania may have to take concerning the bill. The committee wants to initiate a

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<sup>39</sup> Source: Magyar Hirlap Online. Available at <http://www.magyarhirlap.hu/cikk.php3?cikk=100000030150> [23 April 2001]

consultation with the Hungarian Foreign Ministry to express its view on the law.

The Greater Romania Party issued a press statement on the law in which it said that the adoption of the draft status law was very dangerous because it would be interfering with the internal affairs of those countries where Hungarians live. The Greater Romania Party firmly protested against the potential acceptance by the Romanian state of preferences granted by any state to its citizens, especially if these preferences were only granted to the ethnic Hungarian minority.

Romanian Prime Minister Adrian Nastase also expressed concern regarding the so-called status law.<sup>40</sup>

Three days later, Slovak Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda expressed concern about a Hungarian plan to grant special rights to ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries.

"Putting into practice certain parts of the plan might worsen the atmosphere in neighboring countries or between Hungary and its neighbors," Dzurinda said after talks with his Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orban.

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<sup>40</sup> Source: Magyar Tavirati Iroda (Hungarian News Agency). Available at <http://www.mti.hu/hirek/default.asp?pub=KF#43174> [23 April 2001]

"Slovakia attributes great significance to peaceful coexistence not only in the (central European) region but inside its borders as well," he added.

Dzurinda said that Slovakia would "study the plan with great sensitivity" and expressed "hopes that there will be a way for consultations about it with the Hungarian side."<sup>41</sup>

Orban said he was not worried that the law would disturb Hungary's bilateral ties with its neighbors.<sup>42</sup> He said that on the contrary, it would contribute to stability in the region.

## **2. Sensitivity and Tolerance**

Bilateral relations are important elements of a new security system. In Central Europe where the states and the nations do not coincide and in many cases national minorities culturally and linguistically are part of another nation that may be dominant in other country, where in the last hundred years international borders changed frequently, and never as a result of a democratic decision-

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<sup>41</sup> Source: Korridor. Available at <http://www.korridor.hu/cikk.php?cikk=100000008284> [23 April 2001]

<sup>42</sup> For a more recent Romanian reaction to the Status Law proposal see: "Romanians Envious of Hungarian Minority Rights" on the Institute for War & Peace Reporting website at [http://iwpr.vs4.cerbernet.co.uk/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr\\_20010505\\_5\\_eng.txt](http://iwpr.vs4.cerbernet.co.uk/index.pl?archive/bcr/bcr_20010505_5_eng.txt) [14 May 2001]

making, the good neighborhood is the most essential requirement of the regional and all-European stability.

Many observers have strong conviction that ethnic issues alone could blow up the stability of Central Europe and constitute the principle threat to the security of the entire European continent. Others, in the contrary, say that the Yugoslavian developments were unique and isolated, and the existing Central European open minority problems have not led and cannot lead to any military confrontation between the states of the region. Nevertheless, the minority issue does deserve special attention and caution. It seems that Hungary should show more respect toward the neighbors with large Hungarian populations and not being obsessed with the mission of their safeguarding. The stability and peace in Central Europe is still fragile. It would be a tragic mistake to give new evidence how powerful and destructive nationalism could be.

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## **IV. TRANSFORMATION OF THE HUNGARIAN MILITARY**

### **A. REASONS FOR STRATEGIC REVIEW OF HUNGARIAN DEFENSE FORCES**

In the beginning of the 1990s, Hungary was not a member of any military treaty organization, thus it had to protect and defend the territorial integrity and sovereignty on its own.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, Hungary needed a small force in peacetime, which could have been enlarged significantly in case of a conflict. At the same time, the Hungarian Defense Forces (HDF) had outdated assets and equipment, the maintenance of which was extremely costly. With limited available resources, technical modernization was implemented on a very small scale.

The Hungarian military has to comply with recent changes in national and international politics. Hungary's

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<sup>43</sup> In Budapest on 25 February 1991, a "Protocol for the Termination of the Defense Agreements Concluded within the Warsaw Treaty and Liquidation of Its Military Bodies and Structures" was accepted. According to the resolution, beginning with 31 March the activities of the Committee of the Ministers of Defense were terminated, as were those of the Supreme Command of the Unified Armed Forces, the Warsaw Pact's Military Council, the Headquarters of the Committee on Technology, and the Unified Air Defense System. The military treaties of 14 May 1955, 17 March 1969, and 18 March 1980 were nullified.

Source: Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Available (online): <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/php/documents/2/introduction.htm> [29 May 2001]

NATO membership provides an enhanced security guarantee. However, membership in NATO imposes specific obligations on HDF.

From the perspectives of training and combat readiness of troops, the primary objectives of the ongoing force modernization and restructuring process are:

- to eliminate disparity between individual units and organizations, and
- to achieve a significant improvement in training and combat readiness level of troops and in personnel strength of units.

Smaller personnel strength of HDF shall be balanced by:

- concentration of forces,
- retention of necessary capabilities as well as building of new capabilities,
- elimination of unnecessary facilities (assets that cannot be operated economically),
- elimination of redundant equipment,
- reduction of personnel strength of background institutions,
- reduction of personnel strength of military leadership organizations,

- redesign of officer and NCO training schemes,
- improvement in living and working conditions of personnel.

#### **B. LESSONS OF PREVIOUS MILITARY REFORMS**

The HDF have been in a state of restructuring and organizational changes since the mid-80's. However, from the point of view of the military personnel - with specific regard to professional military personnel in field units - the restructuring and reorganization process did not bring much good.

From time to time, the personnel strength was cut without any regard to the strengths or even the weaknesses of individuals. Huge numbers of professional soldiers were laid off; the forces were not managed properly and fragmented. The remaining personnel struggled with outdated equipment and infrastructure.

The basic missions were gradually discarded, the army was losing their prestige in the Hungarian society, and military personnel experienced gradual deterioration of their living and working conditions. A great number of officers and NCOs left the service. Field units with

longstanding traditions were abolished or they lost their viability.

In light of these earlier developments, it is understandable why a new defense reform plan reminds remaining personnel of their unfavorable experiences in the past. Previous restructuring efforts focused upon specific areas and resulted only in quantitative changes.<sup>44</sup>

### **C. GOOD INTENTIONS**

The current Hungarian government issued a program called "Government Program for a Civic Hungary - The new millennium is impending" after the 1998 elections. This document contained the new government's main goals. Below are the aims concerning the defense affairs:

The Government is deeply and unshakably committed to European integration and the Euro-Atlantic concept. All necessary steps will be taken to ensure that Hungary should become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1999, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of NATO. It assumes all the responsibilities associated with membership, and will create the conditions necessary to our complete integration into the Defense activities of NATO, from the creation of civil control over the armed forces to the creation of the capacity to take part in military cooperation. [...] The Government places great importance on strengthening and realizing

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<sup>44</sup> For details, see Jeffrey Simon, NATO Enlargement & Central Europe, Chapter V. NDU Press, Washington D.C., 1996.

democratic civil control over the armed forces...[...] The Government will ensure civil command and control over the armed forces, and will make the necessary organizational changes. [...] In the interest of the improvement of the country's security conditions, the Government will carry out a consistent and well thought-out reform of national defense and the armed forces. New basic policy principles will be put before Parliament, reacting to changed international and national defense conditions. After the acceptance of the law, the Government will create, in a short time, the national security strategy and national military strategy of the Hungarian Republic.<sup>45</sup>

The Government wants to reduce the length of conscripted military service to six months. At the same time the training system for private soldiers and reserve troops will be reformed, and the proportion of long-service staff will be raised to a significantly higher level.

The Government hopes, on the short term (to 1999) to attain a basic level of NATO compatibility in the armed forces. In the middle term (to 2004), the goal is to increase the efficiency of the forces, and to improve the conditions of service, living, and work of those employed in them. In the long term (to 2010), the Government aims to

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<sup>45</sup> Government Program, 1998. Available (online): <http://www.meh.hu/default.htm> [16 May 2001]

reach the level of defense preparedness of an average NATO member state.<sup>46</sup>

#### **D. NEW REQUIREMENTS**

Restructuring of the armed forces will result in the concentration of forces to create a capabilities-based force.

The NATO Defense Capabilities Initiative, adopted at the April 1999 Washington Summit, states:

In many cases, non-Article Five operations will include force contributions from Partners and possibly other non-Allied nations. [...] These developments will make new demands on the capabilities required of Alliance forces, in particular in the field of interoperability. [...] Significant progress has been made in recent years in adapting Alliance forces to the requirements of this new security environment. However, many Allies have only relatively limited capabilities for the rapid deployment of significant forces outside national territory, or for extended containment of operations and protection of forces far from home bases. [...] In identifying the most important areas for improvement, and with a special focus on interoperability, the work has concentrated on the mobility of Alliance forces, on their sustainability and logistics, their survivability and effective engagement capability, and on command and control and information systems.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> On 28 December 1998, the Hungarian Parliament passed the Basic Principles of Security and Defense Policy. The document is available (online): [http://www.complex.hu/kzldat/O98H0094.HTM/MUN\\_3.HTM](http://www.complex.hu/kzldat/O98H0094.HTM/MUN_3.HTM) [7 May 2001]

<sup>47</sup> NATO's Defense Capabilities Initiative. Available (online): <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99s069e.htm> [28 April 2001]

In compliance with the related NATO standards and requirements, HDF will comprise combat, combat support, and combat service support units. Such units will be assigned to the following categories of readiness:

- Reaction forces (immediate and rapid reaction forces), capable of performing their missions in Hungary and abroad, and participate in Article V or in non-Article V type NATO operations as well. Personnel of reaction forces will be composed exclusively of professional and contract soldiers. Equipment, assets, and logistic support shall comply with that of NATO forces. Reaction forces shall be capable of performing their mission without additional preparations or training.
- Main defense forces, deployed in peacetime at a relatively high level of personnel strength. These units can achieve their full-scale readiness by mobilization.
- Reinforcement forces (territorial defense, or reserve units).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Source: Transformation of [Hungarian] Defense Forces. Available (online): <http://www.honvedelem.hu/cikk.php?cikk=275> [13 May 2001]

## **E. AREAS OF MODERNIZATION AND RESTRUCTURING**

### **1. Staff Integration**

Currently, the commander of HDF exercises command over HDF via four senior military leadership organizations, namely through the Defense Staff, the Army Staff, the Air Force Staff and the Logistics Directorate. In compliance with the recently adopted plans, the senior military leadership structure of HDF will be amended.

The Defense Staff will be integrated into the Ministry of Defense. The Minister of Defense will direct HDF via the Chief of Defense Staff. The Defense Staff will act as a staff of the Minister of Defense and be responsible for:

- military professional planning and organizing functions,
- preparation of decisions.

An Army Corps Command and an Air Force Command will be established in order to perform operational command functions. A Recruitment, Mobilization, and Training Command as a new element of the command and control structure will improve the quality of individual training and enhance the efficiency of recruitment efforts.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Source: Transformation of [Hungarian] Defense Forces. Available (online): <http://www.honvedelem.hu/cikk.php?cikk=275> [29 April 2001]



Organizations and activities that are not strictly related to defense will be transferred to other organizations, or they will be abolished. Consequently, the costs of their functions and their activities will not be financed from the Ministry of Defense budget.

In HDF will remain two military services: the Army and the Air Force. They will be organized and trained in compliance with the relevant NATO standards.

## **2. Army**

After the completion of the force modernization and restructuring process, a high level of peacetime manning for mechanized brigades, the light mixed regiment, and reconnaissance battalions will significantly increase the immediate reaction capabilities of Army units and insure their successful operations for national or Alliance needs without the mobilization of other forces.

## **3. Air Force**

The mission of Air Force units remains unchanged. They are maintaining a quick alert duty within the integrated NATO air defense system, and the Air Force has to protect the sovereignty of the Hungarian airspace and provide air support to the Army ground operations.

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#### **4. Background Institutions**

The number of background institutions will be reduced. They will perform strictly military functions that include only peacetime and wartime military unit responsibilities.

Services that require expertise other than military skills will be purchased from civilian contractors.

These efforts should lead to a uniform system of MOD background organizations directly subordinated to the Minister of Defense and performing the following tasks:

- financial and economic affairs of MOD,
- development and procurement,
- military higher education.

The Chief of Defense Staff will have organizations responsible for:

- military strategic planning,
- collecting and processing data relating to the readiness and the daily activities of HDF,
- recruitment, mobilization, and training.

#### **5. Allocation of Personnel**

The restructuring process will bring significant changes in the responsibilities and distribution of tasks between officers and NCOs. With regard to the internal ratios of the personnel, compared to the current peacetime

personnel strength, the ratio of officers' positions, civilian employees, and the number of enlisted positions will be reduced, while the ratio of NCO positions and contract personnel will increase.

#### **6. Location of Units**

Small military organizations that have not operated in a cost efficient manner will be transferred to central "core" garrisons. Restructured combat organizations will comply with NATO doctrine requirements and will meet the relevant standards of interoperability. They will be deployed and distributed in a more practical manner in compliance with the security needs and requirements of the country.

#### **7. Human Resource Management**

An effective human resource management is integral part of the force modernization and restructuring process.

Abolishment of certain field units, redeployment of individual units to new garrisons, and amendment of internal ratios of personnel in rank categories will certainly generate many problems, which require appropriate solutions.

An objective assessment and evaluation system will be implemented and provide a basis for professional

development for both officers and NCOs. This will establish competitive selection for promotions, advanced education, and training.

Promotions to higher rank will be subject to meeting specific requirements and will favor the most talented, best-qualified individuals.

#### **8. Modernization of Equipment**

HDF should write off outdated types of equipment that are considered obsolete.

Command and Control systems, including automation and communications equipments, will be replaced with modern capabilities. The goal is to have equipment that is at the average technological level of partner NATO nations.

#### **9. Schedule**

The key development programs of modernizing HDF shall comprise special projects that are subject to approval by the Parliament, and which require constant monitoring and review by the government. This is a prerequisite condition for ensuring the transparency and the predictability of the financial aspects of the related long term plans.

##### ***Phase I: Restructuring***

The objectives of the first phase, which will last until the year 2003, are:

- to introduce new organizational structures,
- to redeploy specific units of HDF,
- to modify rank and officer/NCO ratios, and
- to improve the living and working conditions of the personnel.

***Phase II: Building of a capabilities-based force***

In Phase II, which is the period until the year 2006, programs of top priority are:

- to complete the improvement of living conditions,
- to achieve high standards of "unit" training,
- to obtain the most important military assets and equipment.

***Phase III: Modernization of equipment***

The objective of Phase III (between 2007 and 2010) is to modernize military assets and equipment. The main tasks are:

- to finalize the procurement of military assets and equipment,
- resolve all outstanding issues of personnel management,

- to finish the implementation of creating objective ratios of personnel categories.<sup>50</sup>

## **F. CURRENT PROCESSES**

Transformation of peacetime organizations began on 1 October 2000. The new Defense Staff organization became operational as of 30 October 2000. In compliance with the new command and control structure, new commands became operational as of 1 December 2000.

The number of peacetime organizations in HDF was reduced to half of the previous level by 30 June 2001.

Negotiations are underway among the six political parties in the Parliament about the amendment of the legislative framework that allows the integration of the Defense Staff into the Ministry of Defense. The parliament also examines the concept of introducing a 6-month versus 9-month conscript service obligation.

Military equipment that is obsolete for operational or technical reasons is being withdrawn from active duty.

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<sup>50</sup> Source: Transformation of [Hungarian] Defense Forces. Available (online): <http://www.honvedelem.hu/cikk.php?cikk=275> [14 May 2001]

A security investment program of NATO - the framework for the common development of the military infrastructure - has been launched. The implementation of the communications and information technology (IT), the radar, the air command and control system, and the airfield capability packages will cost more than 60 billion HUF (\$200 million). Hungary thus will become part of the NATO communications and IT system, which will pave the way for the possibility of basic, safe connection and information sharing. These capabilities are necessary for joining NATO's integrated air defense system. The airfield capability package will provide the means to provide support for NATO reaction forces.<sup>51</sup>

A military vehicle procurement program has recently been launched. It was necessary because the several thousands of the vehicles of the HDF are at the end of their life span. In order for the army to be able to perform its training duties, virtually the entire vehicle fleet should be replaced, which is an investment in the

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<sup>51</sup> Source: Hungarian Defense Mirror, February 2001. Available (online): <http://www.honvedelem.hu/cikk.php?cikk=302> [10 April 2001]

order of HUF 100 billion (\$330 million), lasting at least 10 years.<sup>52</sup>

A current issue is the replacement of fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. The government is currently<sup>53</sup> examining the offers from two main tendering competitors: Lockheed-Martin (F-16) and British Aerospace-Saab (JAS-39 Gripen).

Hungary has received an offer also on sale of used Bell helicopters. There are no details available yet regarding this issue.

#### **G. FLAWS OF THE MILITARY REFORM**

As the above examples prove, there are signs of positive thinking and of momentum towards substantial changes. However, the overall picture would not be complete without warning signals. A status report by Jeffrey Simon from June 2000 on the new NATO members summarized the common problems regarding the military reform in these countries.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Source: Hungarian Defense Mirror, January 2001. Available (online): <http://www.honvedelem.hu/cikk.php?cikk=584> [20 February 2001]

<sup>53</sup> As of May 2001.

<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey Simon, NATO's Membership Action Plan and Defense Planning in Problems of Post-Communism, May/June 2001, pp 29-30.



*Political and budgetary constraints:* The force goals adopted in 1995 have not yet been implemented, not only because of economic constraints, but also because of a failure of political will. Political decisions have often been delayed or avoided because of a lack of political interest...[...] Many senior political leaders are uninformed, civilian specialists are scarce, and an active defense lobby does not exist...[...]

*Planning failures:* Recent force-structure reviews indicate that the newest members lack resources adequate for their NATO force-goal commitments...[...]

*Restructuring of military personnel:* Each of the three new members is still struggling with the necessity of reorganizing its officer corps and building a non-commissioned officer corps. Both of these challenges call for the establishment of career paths and rigorous personnel policies.

*Inadequate constitutional and legal systems:* Military confusion persists over the division of executive powers, including relations between general staffs and defense ministries...[...]

*Basic concepts:* [...] ... Limited resources have forced new members to adopt a piecemeal approach to building forces. Kosovo demonstrated the likelihood of out-of-area operations, and thus the need for legal changes and new and different types of armed forces. Sending units abroad requires sustainability, different logistics, and combat support. In addition, the European Union's entry into crisis management creates competing demands and necessitates greater EU-NATO cooperation.

*Defense planning complications:* There are significant incompatibilities between partner and NATO planning processes. This problem persists, at least in part, because the partners do not have enough English-language-trained personnel

who understand NATO procedures. In addition, partner officials seem to think that political oversight and civilian control come about merely by replacing military officers with civilians...[...]

*Declining support for the military:* The new members failed to prepare their political elites and the populace at large for NATO membership. As a result, popular support for the military is declining in all three countries...[...] ...NATO action in Kosovo in 1999 affected popular attitudes toward membership...[...]<sup>55</sup>

All of the above mentioned problems still exist in Hungary as of May 2001. The promised new, Western-style human resources management has failed to emerge so far. Those still in the military that have competitive and transformable knowledge will leave if proper conditions (housing, salary, working environment, foreseeable career path) are missing.

The civilian control of Hungarian military is not civilian at all. The state secretary and three out of four deputy state secretaries of the Ministry of Defense (MoD) are former generals of the HDF. The "militarization" of the MoD, accomplished by the previous government between 1994-1998, was a feature that the Fidesz (Fiatal Demokratak Szovetsege, Hungarian Civic Party [HCP], the main party in

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<sup>55</sup> Jeffrey Simon, NATO's Membership Action Plan and Defense Planning in Problems of Post-Communism, May/June 2001, pp 29-30.

the governing coalition) rightfully criticized. In the 1998, Government Program the HCP stressed for civil control of the defense affairs. Now, after three years of HCP governing, as a journalist noted with irony, the total civil control of MoD has come true: every civilians in the Ministry are under military control.<sup>56</sup>

There is no, of course, danger of a military cup. The "undressed" generals, however, may represent a danger in another way: harmful interlocking of interests could form among them and their uniformed subordinates.

The HCP has given a proof that it lacked the real political will to solve the decade-old problem of the military. After the 1998 elections, the Smallholders' Party (SP), as a coalition partner of the HCP, got the Defense portfolio along with two not less important ones, the Environmental and the Agricultural.

Being aware that the SP would not be able to run these ministries due to lack of qualified and experienced personnel, the HCP nevertheless let its junior partner do serious damage in almost every place where appointees from SP were in charge.

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<sup>56</sup> Source: HVG 2001/9 (3 March 2001), pp 54-55. Available (online): <http://folioweb.hvg.hu> [16 May 2001]

Popular support for the military is in decline. It is very characteristic that while ten years ago the military colleges were among the most popular schools, now graduates from high schools prefer going to civilian universities, though military education remained the cheapest of all.<sup>57</sup>

There is a saying that reads in Hungarian as follows: a rich army arms, a poor army dresses. According to this, the HDF quickly changed its status from a poor army (a uniform change took place in the early 90's) to a rich one (Hungary is planning to buy supersonic fighter-bombers). The reality is that the performance of Hungarian economy is not enough for such an expensive demonstration of endeavor. High-ranking NATO officials frequently stated that changing of command structure, modernizing of communication and IT equipment, and enlarging of the ratio of English-speaking personnel in the HDF are much more important than swift change of the aging (but in some cases usable) weaponry. Unfortunately, it seems that the Hungarian leadership is obsessed with having high-tech aircraft (that would certainly cause worries in some neighboring countries), while draining the otherwise scarce budgetary sources.

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<sup>57</sup> From the author's personal experience as a military college teacher.

The hard-reached six-party parliamentary consensus, necessary for changing the Constitution in order to promote the military reform, is in danger. The main opposition party threatens to withdraw from the agreement due to the nature (or the lack) of the fighter aircraft tender. In fact, there was no tender at all. The government, avoiding the obligatory parliamentary commission, directly started negotiations on acquiring of used F-16s from the United States.<sup>58</sup> This fact generated bad memories in the Hungarian public.<sup>59</sup>

The overall picture about Hungarian defense report is mixed. One could say that this performance is not worse than those of the other two new NATO members are. Nevertheless, there is a danger of losing momentum. Moreover, the allies expect Hungary to fulfill its promises and obligations. The honeymoon is over. It is time to work.

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<sup>58</sup> Source: HVG 2001/16 (21 April 2001), pp 110-111. Available (online): <http://folioweb.hvg.hu> [11 May 2001]

<sup>59</sup> Back in June 1999, several HCP MPs lobbied for a Lockheed-Martin (the manufacturer of F-16) official in order to help him be appointed Ambassador of the United States to Hungary. Their effort was unsuccessful. Source: HVG 1999/51-52 (25 December 1999), p 95. Available (online): <http://folioweb.hvg.hu> [13 May 2001]

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## **V. CONCLUSIONS**

The year 1999 in Hungary has proved to be a year where history was made as well as commemorated and celebrated. The final 12 months of the millennium witnessed Hungary being welcomed back into the circle of Western nations with its accession to NATO, and the celebration of the end to division on the European continent with the collapse of the Communist regimes. In this process, Hungary had played a key role in the shape of the Pan-European Picnic at Sopron in 1989, which proved to be the catalyst of a swift and irreversible decline.

### **A. THE EFFECT OF KOSOVO**

Euphoria at NATO membership was almost immediately tempered by the outbreak of the Kosovo crisis, which served as a reminder that Hungary had taken on a new set of responsibilities as well as enjoying a new set of privileges.

A united front, a spirit of sticking together was now required, setting aside differences for the greater good. As the air strikes continued, a temporary cease-fire was called amongst the political "benches."

Hungary was suddenly confronted with the real possibility of retaliation. Speculations arose as to what this revenge might entail, ranging from fear of a physical breach of the country's territorial integrity (the Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, was adamant on the matter of NATO's mutual defense guarantee should the situation deteriorate that far), since Hungary is the only NATO member to share a border with Yugoslavia, to attacks on the Hungarian minority of the Vojvodina. In a particularly vulnerable position, the Hungarian minority could have easily been the next in line for a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Common sense prevailed: Hungary opted for a defensive rather than a belligerent role, authorizing the use of its airspace by its Allies and rigorously fulfilling its international obligations on the ground. Hungary was consistent with the common goals - even up to damage of its relations with Russia when Moscow objected to the way, Hungary delayed Russian aid convoys crossing Hungarian soil.

The Kosovo crisis brought to the surface many deficiencies of the Hungarian Armed Forces: inadequate equipment, insufficient training, lack of knowledge of foreign (English) language. It was a shame that the



Hungarian Air Force could not participate in the defense of home airspace. The Hungarian Mig-29s were grounded because their on-board acquisition and identification system (IFF) was not compatible with NATO standards and thus they could easily be mistaken by Yugoslav aircraft.

There is work ahead in the area of civil control of the military and in human resource management as well.

Nevertheless, Hungary is on the right path. Its contribution to the peacekeeping effort allowed proving that, although it had not committed fighting troops, the country was concerned to what had occurred so close to its borders.

Ambivalence towards the whole NATO effort was unavoidable. Hungary had to cope with the sobering realities of what it meant to take sides. Old wounds were very publicly reopened: politicians frequently mentioned the bonds uniting Hungary with its "lost children" of Vojvodina in order to drag more voters into their camp.

On 20 August [1999], ten thousand supporters of the Hungarian Life and Justice Party (MIEP) from all over Central Europe, including speakers from Romania, Slovakia and Yugoslavia, gathered in Budapest demanding a UN-supervised referendum on Hungary's re-annexation of northern Vojvodina to prevent "another genocide in the area." [...] MIEP President Csurka proclaimed that "nothing else can ensure the safety of Hungarian lives based on our experience of the Yugoslav situation." Political analysts say that MIEP, a parliamentary

party with about five percent support, is extremely isolated in its views. Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi rejected Csurka's "irresponsible proposals," saying that the Hungarian Government "does not want to change the borders but the nature of borders." Prime Minister Orban later stated that border revisions do not figure in the government's program in any way. [...] The Hungarian government has gone to great lengths to reassure its neighbors that Hungary is not seeking territorial revisions by including such promises in bilateral treaties.<sup>60</sup>

Hungary showed fortitude in its reaction to the crisis. The spirit of revisionism had been finally suppressed.

Had this issue been allowed to get out of hand, it would have been more than a matter of embarrassment to the Government, but would have cast doubts on its policy towards the Hungarian minorities as a whole.

## **B. STEADY GROWTH**

Initially, Hungarian membership of NATO was presented as a stepping-stone towards joining the European Union (EU). Given that Hungary had been deemed fit for active service in the world's strongest (and most prestigious) military alliance, the EU could not have any excuse it

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<sup>60</sup> Source: Central Europe Review Online, <http://www.ce-review.org/99/10/hungarynews10.html> [10 May 2001]

might have had over enlargement, at least as far as the Hungarian candidacy was concerned.

In its 1999 regular report on Hungary's progress towards accession, the European Commission concluded that "...Hungary fulfills the Copenhagen political criteria. Two areas still need attention. The first is the situation of the Roma [the largest ethnic minority in Hungary, about 800,000 people]...[...] The second is the fight against corruption where recent efforts need to be reinforced."

Concerning the basic democratic rights, the report says:

Hungary respects the freedom of the press. The market for news is highly competitive and the major part of the print media and of radio and television stations are in private hands providing a wide variety of high-quality, uncensored national and local information. [...] <sup>61</sup>

What about the economic criteria?

Conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council stated that membership of the Union requires:

- existence of a functioning market economy,
- capacity to cope with the competitive pressures and market forces within the Union.

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<sup>61</sup> For the full text of the Report see the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website at [http://www.mfa.gov.hu/euanyag/hu\\_en.html](http://www.mfa.gov.hu/euanyag/hu_en.html) [14 May 2001]

According to the above mentioned report:

Hungary is a functioning market economy and the legal and institutional structures... have been further strengthened. It should be able to cope with the competitive pressures and market forces within the Union in the medium term provided it continues to make further progress in structural reforms.<sup>62</sup>

Although inflation had not dropped to the extent originally hoped for, Hungary nevertheless remained the only country in Europe where it had fallen. The year 2000 had proven to be Hungary's most successful year so far economically, with GNP rising above five per cent, exports reaching a value of 30 billion euros and debt servicing below 20 per cent compared to the 60 per cent figure at the beginning of the 1990s.

### **C. MINORITIES AS ASSETS**

Hungary was able to show to the world that it is a responsible and equal partner, which can be relied upon.

Within the region as a whole, Hungary has a difficult balancing act to perform, and here the minorities complicate matters further. The country has made efforts to

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<sup>62</sup> For the full text of the Report see the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website at [http://www.mfa.gov.hu/euanyag/hu\\_en.html](http://www.mfa.gov.hu/euanyag/hu_en.html) [14 May 2001]

emphasize its inclusive approach to the issue of enlargement, that, if Hungarian accession were to take place sooner than that of neighboring countries, Hungary would use the advantages of being able to participate in the Institutions as an insider to the mutual benefit of all. NATO has been a useful forum in this respect. Political attention has been focused on ensuring that Hungary's intentions are properly understood. As a Hungarian diplomat expressed it:

I consider it important to underline that Hungarian national minorities living in Central and Eastern Europe represent a stabilizing factor [the prevailing fear within the EU, exacerbated by events in Kosovo, is that they might end up being precisely the opposite, namely a cause of friction and dispute]. Thus, the change in their fortunes is closely linked with the stability of the region and indirectly of Europe as a whole. In Hungary, the current government has undertaken a constitutional obligation to take account of the situation of the Hungarian nation as a whole, affording it legal protection and bolstering the effectiveness of the rights it enjoys by means of both bilateral relations and multilateral diplomacy. Our integration efforts cannot run counter to this constitutional commitment, so we intend to create accession conditions which do not lead to discrimination against the Hungarian minorities living beyond our borders, but which are at the same time acceptable to the European Union and its Member States."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> From State Secretary of MFA Zsolt Nemeth's speech at the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EU-Hungary Joint Parliamentary Committee held in Brussels on November 24-25, 1999. Source: Nepszabadsag Online, 27 Nov 1999. Available at <http://www.nepszabadsag.hu/Archiv/Archiv.asp?SID=1> [20 April 2001]

Far from being an obstacle to accession, the Hungarian minorities can act as a bridgehead, fostering mutual understanding and co-operation. The most tangible and literal symbol of it is the reconstruction of the Maria Valeria Bridge between Esztergom of Hungary and Sturovo (Parkany) in Slovakia. With the help of EU resources from the PHARE Program, the bridge will stimulate trade and boost prosperity as well as functioning as the highly visible embodiment of a spirit of reconciliation.

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